

The Las Vegas Mormon Fort Sesquicentennial Commemoration

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On 11 June 2005, the Old Las Vegas Mormon Fort celebrated a sesquicentennial anniversary. As part of Las Vegas's official 100th anniversary observance, the Mormon fort, the first structure built by whites in the Las Vegas Valley, observed the 150th anniversary of its founding. The fort is located at the Mormon Fort State Park, 500 East Washington Street, in Las Vegas. The fort is believed to be the oldest standing building in the state. A new visitors' center/museum was dedicated during the event.

The day's activities began early with an old-fashioned flapjack breakfast followed by the dedication program where government dignitaries and local religious leaders observed and commemorated the Mormon pioneer founding and recent restoration efforts. The most notable of these efforts is the construction of the new visitors' center/museum. David Morrow, director of Nevada State Parks, conducted the dedication program. Speakers included Gary Reese, acting mayor of Las Vegas; Rory Reid, county commissioner; Jonathan Bullen, board member of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation; Shelley Berkley, U.S. Congresswoman; and Ace Robinson, president of the Logandale Stake of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Las Vegas Mormon Youth Symphony and Choir provided the music. A pioneer Dutch-oven lunch, entertainment, dancing, music, crafts, and pioneer demonstrations followed in the afternoon. Tours of the fort and visitors' center, along with a book signing by BYU professor and author Fred E. Woods,

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Ribbon cutting ceremony of the new Mormon Fort Stake Park visitors' center in Las Vegas, Nevada, 11 June 2005. Photograph courtesy Fred E. Woods.

were conducted late into the day. An estimated three thousand people attended the anniversary events.¹

The Mormon settlement in Las Vegas was an answer to the call Brigham Young made to thirty missionaries “to take a mission to Las Vegas to make a settlement and cultivate the Indians.”² The fort also served as an important weigh station between Salt Lake City, Utah, and San Bernardino, California. Though the mission was short-lived (1855–57), the fort stands as a visible reminder of the remarkable faith and effort of these early Saints. The notable story of this colonization effort in the Nevada desert can be read in the recently published book written by Fred E. Woods, *A Gamble in the Desert: The Mormon Mission in Las Vegas (1855–1857)* (Salt Lake City: Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, 2005).

Notes

1. See John Hanks, “Old Las Vegas Fort,” *Church News* 75, no. 25 (18 June 2005): 6.
2. John Steele, *Diary* (typescript), 35, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.



*Two views of the Las Vegas Mormon Fort, 11 November 2005.
Photographs by Derek J. Tangren.*

